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THE VARIETY OF Vance and Avon Faience: PART II: AVON FAIENCE COMPANY

The Variety of Vance and Avon Faience: Part I, The Vance Faience Company appeared in our March/April 2005 issue.

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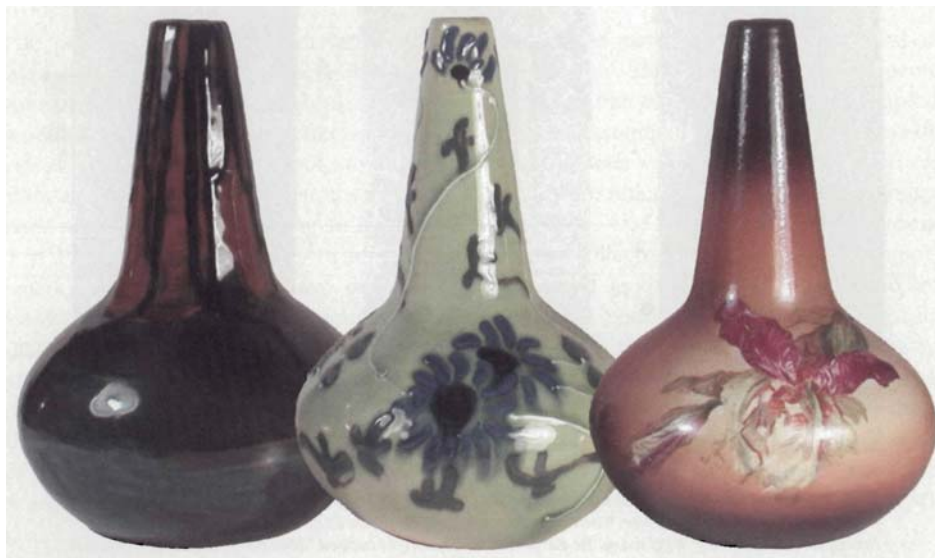


Avon Faience Co. "Spring" jardiniere and pedestal, "The Splendid Raiment of the Spring Peeps Forth." 40 inches high. No mark.

On March 15, 1901, capital stock of the Vance Faience Co. was reduced from \$1,000,000 to a more realistic \$50,000, and the office was removed from Tiltonville, Ohio, to Wheeling, West Virginia, a foreshadowing of things to come. On September 2, 1902, the Vance Faience Co. officially became the Avon Faience Co. The new name may have been suggested by the new manager, William P. Jervis, although at the time there was no history of an Avon pottery in England. It seems unlikely that this name would have been chosen had the company been aware of the earlier, short-lived Avon Pottery of Cincinnati.

As Evans notes, the embossed or ink-stamped "church steeple" Avon WPTs [Wheeling Potteries] mark for the Avon Division of the Wheeling Potteries Co. was designed by Jervis, though there is some question as to when it was first used on Avon ware ¹. Several hand-incised variants of the Avon WPTs mark exist on Vance Faience shapes, including one dated 1902. Perhaps all of these pieces with incised Avon marks are relatively early (1902-03), or the hand-incised mark may have continued to be used with the earthenware body whenever the mold did not happen to include the embossed church mark. Confusingly, typical Avon squeeze-bag and/or slip trailing occurs on some pieces with only an impressed Vance mark, and sometimes both impressed Vance and incised Avon marks occur on the same piece.

Marion Nelson appears to be the first to suggest that slip trailing was introduced at the Avon Faience Company by Jervis and that tube-lining or "squeeze bag" decoration was introduced by Frederick H. Rhead, who appears to have arrived at Tiltonville in June, 1902 ². While an intriguing idea, the question is complicated by the fact that the earliest marked and dated Avon Faience pieces available (1902) exhibit both broad slip trailing and narrow tube-lining, as do Roseville and Weller Faience pieces signed by Rhead. In addition, we do not know certainly when Jervis or Rhead arrived at Avon Faience, although it is generally accepted that Jervis was already there when Rhead arrived in June, 1902. If Jervis did indeed introduce the broad slip trailing, Rhead was certainly not averse to using it, for a typically "tree-decorated" (1241) piece hand-inscribed with Avon steeple mark and dated 1903 is signed by Rhead. (For some reason, Jervis, who diligently signed his pieces produced at East Liverpool's Craven Pottery, does not seem to have signed any Avon pieces.)



Three Avon vases, shape 125. a) earthenware, hand-incised AVON 125-1241; b) earthenware, hand-incised “L”; c) whiteware with iris decal, part of Wheeling Potteries “Gigantic” assortment, impressed Vance F. Co. N. 125. All 6 inches high.

Many Avon pieces are marked with a 3 digit/4 digit hyphenated number, and study makes it clear that the three digit number is a shape number while the 4 digit number represents the specific style of decoration. In fact, the shape numbers are carried over from Vance Faience shapes, although Avon pieces do not always bear a shape number. The most common decorative style numbers are for the slip-trailed orange and black tree motif already mentioned and 1005 for the tube-lined blue with five petaled mauve “primroses.” Other decoration numbers include 1257 for the bird-foot- like motif and 1014 for an incised tree on orange base.

According to Evans, all artware production at Tiltonville ended in late 1905, with production of the Avon line moving to Wheeling, at which time the body of the ware was changed from earthenware to semi-porcelain³. By this time both Jervis and Rhead were long gone, having departed by mid 1903, but their decorating techniques and motifs continued to be used, even on some semi-porcelain, notably wash sets and kitchenware. The question of when production shifted from yellow clay to whiteware does not seem to be quite so simple, however. Even during the short life of the Avon pottery at Tiltonville, clays changed from a deep tan/yellow to a cream or ivory color, and unglazed sherds of Wheeling Potteries’ “Green Band” tea ware have been found at the Tiltonville site. Unglazed whiteware sherds of the “Sunflower” jardinière have also been found at the Tiltonville plant site. This shape, which bears Lorber's in-mold signature, is known only with a Vance F. Co./Tiltonville mark and only in semi-porcelain. A 1906 catalog of the Wheeling Potteries Co., which illustrates the “Avon Department” but makes no further reference to Avon, advertises a few dozen of the Sunflower jardinière and pedestal “to close out,” underscoring the fact that neither Wheeling Potteries nor the Avon Faience Co. was that particular about how their ware was marked.



Three triangular Avon vases. a) Decorative Design 1241. Marked only with embossed Avon WPTs church mark; b) “Roses Will Bloom Nor Want BeHolders Sprung from the Dust Where Our Flesh Moulders.” Embossed Avon

Church WPTs mark. Ex-Berberian Collection; c) Incised "188-1005" and artist's initials "M.P. "All are 9 inches high.

The 1906 catalog raises more question than it answers, illustrating numerous products known for the most part only with the familiar ink-stamped Avon church mark or backstamp, presumably later than earthenware pieces with the embossed church mark, but in the catalog described as "the best La Belle china." (La Belle was another Wheeling "department," best known for its Flow Blue decorative ware.) The 1906 catalog also illustrates a "Gigantic" vase assortment of twelve Vance shapes decorated with nasturtium decals and the standard brown air-brushed glaze made so popular by Warwick China and used by virtually every Ohio Valley dinnerware maker for their art china line. These "Gigantic" shapes (actually rather small vases - it is the assortment apparently that was "gigantic") are known only with the impressed Vance mark (on whiteware bodies with decals) or with various incised Avon marks and, rarely, the embossed "church" mark, these latter on earthenware bodies. Unmarked examples that might be confused with Warwick or other "art china" can be identified by the shape and by the carelessly air-sprayed base, which often sports fingerprints of the "artist." It is possible that the Vance Faience Pottery produced semi-porcelain whiteware but it appears more likely that Vance shapes, with impressed Vance mark were indiscriminately used later by Avon and by Wheeling. It remains a puzzle both when and where some of the presumably later pieces were made. The popular embossed and hand-painted tulip and daffodil jugs, probably precursors of Roseville's similar embossed floral jugs, have been seen variously with the ink-stamped Avon church mark and with a Wheeling Potteries mark, while one daffodil jug (illustrated in Part I) has an impressed Vance mark. Also problematic are the well-known hound-handled "Greatbach" pitchers (also illustrated in Part I), which are known only with an impressed Vance mark but have a whiteware body. Only archaeological investigation of the Vance and Avon Faience pottery site is likely to clarify whether whiteware was indeed made there, but it seems quite possible. That question aside, it would seem that the whiteware body and ink backstamps indicate a later date and that later examples may include whiteware retaining an impressed Vance mark.

In terms of art pottery, collectors have developed little interest in the obviously late and somewhat pedestrian whiteware tankard and mug sets or the toilet sets, unless the pieces are decorated with squeeze-bag. Rarely is such the case, as on a small pitcher with stylized crocus or lotus (and ink church backstamp) or two smaller creamers unmarked or crudely incised "AVON." The apogee of Avon Faience art pottery undoubtedly is the series of four seasonal jardinière and pedestals, which were created in several sizes, each with an appropriate motto in squeeze-bag around the jardinière rim. That for "Summer," which may be the most common, reads "Summer's Symphony of Love Laughter, and Life." "Spring" bears "The Splendid Raiment of The Spring Peeps Forth." These jardinières and pedestals were offered in several sizes, the largest being forty inches high. Few complete matching sets are known. A triangular shaped vase, similar to a shape later used by Roseville Pottery, was admirably suited for squeeze-bag lettering and bears the mordant motto, "Roses Will Bloom Nor Want Beholders Sprung From the Dust Where Our Flesh Moulders." A paneled inkwell sports the squeeze-bag inscription, "For Glances Beget Ogles, Ogles Sighs, Sighs Wishes, Wishes Words & Words a Letter."



Four different decorative styles on Shape 164. a) incised AVON over waves and 1902; b) marked 1241/164 Q c) “Fringing the Dusty Roads with harmless Gold, “ embossed church mark; d) decorative style 1005, embossed church mark. All 9 inches high.



Three small Avon cream pitchers, 3 inches high, marked a) ink stamped Avon WPTs, b) incised “Avon,” c) embossed Avon WPTs mark.

In terms of art pottery history, excavation at the Tiltonville plant site might yield significant information regarding the sequence of Vance, Avon, and Wheeling (Avon Dept.) shapes and styles but barring discovery of an Avon Faience catalog, it is unlikely we will learn more from the printed or archival record.

Footnotes:

- 1 Dale (*Frederick Hurten Rhead: An English Potter in America*. Erie, Pa.: Erie Art Institute, 1986) repeatedly refers to this as a “castle mark” but according to *Glass and Pottery World* (XIV(2): 32), “This trademark, cleverly representing a church steeple and a river, was designed by W. P. Janas...”
- 2 Nelson, Marion. *Art Pottery of the Midwest*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Art Museum, 1988, p. 29-30.
- 3 Evans, Paul. *Art Pottery of the United States*. New York, NY: Feingold and Lewis, 1987, p. 305.



Vance and Avon Shape 128, Incised Variant of Avon WPTs mark, dated 1903 and signed Rhead. 4 ¾ inches high.



Two Different Decorative Techniques on a Vance Shape: a) squeeze-bag floral treatment, impressed Vance F Co.; b) slip trailed and hand-painted owl, impressed Vance F. Co. and incised Avon over waves and 1903- Both earthenware, 9 inches high.

James L. Murphy, Professor Emeritus, Ohio State University Libraries, has written numerous articles on Ohio ceramics, archaeology, and geology. A power point presentation of his lecture on Art Pottery Archaeology in Ohio is available online at http://library.osu.edu/sites/cataloging/Potterylecture_files/frame.htm